Post 10-15-77

Spy Thinks He Should Be Freed

STOCKHOLM (UPI) — Sweden's superspy, Col. Stig Wennerstroem, has no regrets that he stole NATO and American military secrets for the Russians but he thinks he has been in jail long enough, almost 10 years.

His appeals for pardon in recent years have been consistently turned down, but his most recent appeal this summer, according to authorities, has a good chance of being granted, perhaps next year.

When Wennerstroem, a high Defense Ministry official, was exposed as a Soviet spy in 1963, the whole Western world was shocked.

It developed that the then Air Force colonel began spying for the Russians in 1948 when he sold a map of a secret Swedish air base to the Soviet attache in Stockholm for $1,000.

He went onto the Soviet KGB's payroll, he said at his trial, in 1949 when he was posted to Moscow as air attache in the Swedish Embassy. In 1952 he was transferred to the Washington Embassy, being paid $1,000 a month by the Russians for any tidbits he could pass along about the U.S. Strategic Air Command and other defense systems.

When he subsequently was assigned to the military office of the Swedish Ministry of Defense he continued passing information to the Russians, including top secret details of NATO operations and installations.

In 1962, he confessed, he told the Kremlin of the U.S. decision to blockade Cuba, during the missile crisis, six days before President John F. Kennedy put the blockade in force.

Former Prime Minister Tage Erlander called Wennerstroem "the worst spy ever to hit Sweden." NATO sources in Norway said the information he fed the Russians "burst NATO's northern flank wide open."

Wennerstroem was unrepentant at his trial and he remains so today. "I still feel I did right in spying for the Russians," he told a Swedish newsman recently. "I helped establish a military balance between the superpowers."

He told the same newsman that he felt he should now be released, saying, "I am an old man today (he is 65) and no foreign government is interested in me any more."

Wennerstroem was sentenced to life imprisonment but under Swedish practice a life termer may apply for pardon after 7½ years. For offenses equivalent to Wennerstroem's the usual minimum term is 10 years.

The spy colonel began his term in a maximum security cell in Stockholm's Laangholmen prison. His health suffered under the 24-hour isolation and on one occasion he tried to commit suicide. Since then he has passed gradually through Sweden's prison system to minimum security jails.